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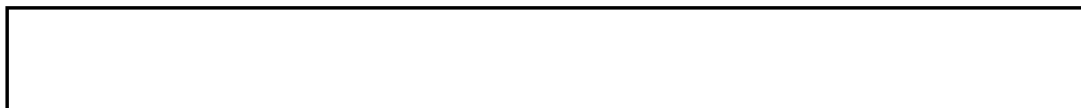
Approved For Release 2005/04/22 : CIA-RDP86T00608R000500040014-9

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Independent Republicans Building Party Machine
to Challenge Gaullists

French President Giscard's party, the Independent Republicans, is slowly building a nationwide organization it hopes will allow it to reduce the Gaullists' numerical dominance of the governing majority in the next election. The Independent Republicans have 64 Assembly members; the Gaullists hold about 170 of the 490 seats. Parliamentary elections are scheduled for 1978 and are unlikely to be called sooner, according to party president Poniatowski, who is also Giscard's right-hand man, because the IR needs time to prepare for the competition.

The party is a moderately conservative movement that was formed in 1962 when Giscard led members of the former right-wing National Center of Independents and Peasants into an alliance with President de Gaulle. Its main purpose since then has been to advance Giscard. Now the party of the president, it has been trying for the past year to shed its image as a collection of notables--often unresponsive to party discipline--and to label itself as a centrist movement to which moderates of both left and right can rally. These efforts have been hobbled by party leaders' need to concentrate on their new duties in the national government.

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The party leadership is considering specific tactics to increase its strength. Only 50-60 incumbent Gaullist deputies will be designated for re-election as "candidates of the presidential majority." The remainder will have to compete in the first round of the elections against candidates endorsed by the Elysee. District boundaries may also be redrawn. Gerrymandering now makes it possible for the Gaullists to win more Assembly seats than justified by their percentage of the total votes. The Independent Republicans are also revitalizing their youth groups in a nationwide search for talent and to establish grass roots contacts with voters.

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Austria Tempers Dispute With Yugoslavia

Despite Yugoslav assertions last week that Austria has failed to protect minority rights as required under the State Treaty, Chancellor Kreisky is prepared to continue bilateral contacts with Belgrade on other topics.

Although Kreisky recalled his ambassador in Belgrade "to report" on the controversy, the Chancellor's recent attitude suggests that the emissary may soon return to his post. Furthermore, Vienna still intends to send a delegation to Belgrade for talks on improving educational opportunities for Yugoslav guest workers in Austria.

At the heart of the dispute is Article seven of the State Treaty which stipulates that Austrian authorities must provide road signs in the language of local minorities resident in certain parts of Austria. In September 1972, extremists among the German-speaking majority in the province of Carinthia tore down roads signs in the language of the local Slovene minority. Ever since this incident, the Yugoslav government has alleged that Vienna is ignoring its obligations under the State Treaty. Belgrade also charged that Vienna has failed to restrict the activities of anti-Titoist emigres on Austrian soil. The Yugoslavs issued a particularly strong statement on the eve of celebrations commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the Austrian State Treaty on May 15. Kreisky quickly rejected the protest and recalled Vienna's ambassador.

Media in both capitals are still trading insults. The Yugoslav press hammered away at the pan-German syndrome which it contends is a hold-over from Austria's

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participation on the side of Nazi Germany in World War II. Not to be outdone, the Austrian radio accused the Yugoslav press of irresponsibility and dredged up the record of fanatical Serbian agitation before World War I that led to the assassination of Franz-Ferdinand and the outbreak of war.

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French Foreign Minister Living on
Borrowed Time

French Foreign Minister Sauvagnargues is coming under increasingly heavy criticism from the Paris press, leading to renewed speculation that he may be on his way out.

Ever since last fall, Sauvagnargues has been tipped by French political observers as a likely candidate for replacement. Over the past several weeks the Paris press--with which Sauvagnargues has had consistently bad relations--has moved from allegations that the foreign minister is unhappy and frustrated with his job to a frontal assault clearly aimed at hastening his departure.

The respected left-of-center Le Monde and the Gaullist-oriented newsweekly Le Point have led the charge, accusing Sauvagnargues, and by implication, Giscard of ineptitude and lack of direction in foreign policy. The cover story in the current issue of Le Point--"The Gaffes of French Diplomacy"--blames the foreign minister for three recent major setbacks in French diplomacy: the collapse of the Paris energy preparatory conference, lack of progress in constructing a united Europe, and failure of the French initiative in Indochina. Citing Sauvagnargues as an "illustration of the Peter Principle," Le Point speculates that a stronger foreign minister might temper Giscard's more ill-considered flights of enthusiasm.

The press has also pounced on a series of recent alleged gaffes by Sauvagnargues--most notably, his introduction of pianist Arthur Rubinstein as "Mr. Toscanini" at an official dinner for Israeli Foreign Minister Allon.

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Last week Giscard and Prime Minister Chirac both moved to defend Sauvagnargues and counter speculation about his imminent departure from the government. Earlier this week, the president assured his cabinet that there would be no reshuffle "at the moment." The show of unity by the government seems pro forma, however, and has not affected the general feeling that Sauvagnargues is living on borrowed time. Giscard is, in essence, defending himself, since the foreign minister is widely regarded as a presidential cat's paw, and Chirac's desire to see Sauvagnargues replaced has been well known for some time. The US embassy in Paris notes that the editorial board of Le Point has become closely tied to Chirac in the last few months.

It seems likely that Sauvagnargues will step down before the year is out, but the timing of such a move is difficult to predict. He is unlikely to be replaced before the end of the current Assembly session at the end of June. For maximum political impact, Giscard would probably wait until sometime after the summer doldrums and before the opening of the next Assembly in October. [REDACTED]

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